CULINARY HISTORIANS

FROM THE PAST

Gastronomic Humor-An Old Tradition



by Jan Longone

A recent publication, Food (New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1989) collects the witty verses and quips of the well known American humorist Ogden Nash. It contains many of his most famous gastronomic writings:

If it's food,
It's food;
Never mind what kind of food.
When I ponder my mind
I consistently find
It is glued
On food...

From The Clean Platter

I cheerfully forgive my debtors, But I'll never pardon iceberg lettuce From *Iceberg Lettuce*

Some people call the parsnip edible; Myself, I find this claim incredible. From *The Parsnip*

Candy
Is dandy
But liquor
Is quicker.

From Reflections on Ice-Breaking

This is, however, not the first time that the humorous talents of Ogden Nash have been employed in a cookbook. In 1933, he wrote an introduction to Harriet Ross Colquitt's *The Savannah Cook Book*. This book, long a southern classic, contains historic Georgia

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Publication

of the

Culinary

Historians

of Ann Arbor

recipes: Mrs. Habersham's Terrapin Stew, Cream Biscuits (for State Occasions), Hominy Bread, Rice Bird Pilau, Hopping John, Ogeechee Lime Preserves, as well as notes on old Georgia cooking traditions such as the Oyster Roast, Possum and 'Taters, the Turtle Egg Hunt, and the serving, by the oldest military organization in Georgia, of Chatham Artillery Punch, "as much a part of their outfit as the cannons which still grace every parade."

Nash's humor, interest in gastronomy, and knowledge of American history all are clearly evident in his introductory poem, quoted in full:

Pilgrim's Progress is a good book, and so, I am told is Deuteronomy

But neither is to be compared with this epic of gastronomy.

Some people have to die to get to heaven, and others hitchhike in fiery

But really intelligent people stay home alive and have heaven served to them out of this volume of Miss Harriet's, For as everybody knows, life on Savannah victuals

Is just one long round of Madeira and skictuals.

Certainly every schoolboy knows that famous remark made by the late Mark Hanna:

"I care not who makes our Presidents as long as I can eat in Savannah."

If you like dishes made out of a piece of lettuce and ground-up peanuts and a maraschino cherry and marshmallow whip and a banana

You will not get them in Savannah, But if you seek something headier than

nectar and tastier than ambrosia and more palatable than manna,

Set your teeth, I beg you, in one of these specialities de Savannah.

Everybody has the right to think whose food is the most gorgeous,
And I nominate Georgia's.

A generation earlier, another well known writer contributed a humorous introduction to an American Cookbook. In the midst of the First World War, Allied Cookery was compiled by Grace Clergue Harrison and Gertrude Clergue (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, The Knickerbocker Press, 1916) "To Aid the War Sufferers in the Devastated Districts of France." The book was a fundraiser, which would contain recipes solely from allied countries -Britain, France, Italy, Belgium and Russia. This selectivity was apparently too much for the Canadian humorist Stephen Leacock, whose four page preface is simply hilarious. A small portion is excerpted below:

As soon as I heard of the proposed plan of this book I became positively frantic to co-operate in it. The idea of a



cookery book which would contain Allied Recipes and Allied Recipes only struck me at once as one of the finest ideas of the day.

For myself I have felt for some time past that the time is gone, and gone for ever, when I can eat a German Pretzel or a Wiener Schnitzel.

It gives me nothing but remorse to remember that there were days when I tolerated, I may even say enjoyed, Hungarian Goulash. I could not eat it now. As for Bulgarian Boosh or Turkish Tch'kk, the mere names of them make me ill.

For me, for the rest of my life, it must be Allied Food or no food at all. . .

Both these twentieth century writers were humorous by intention. Earlier cookbooks do not appear to have a large amount of such humor. But unintentional humor does appear. An example can be culled from a most intriguing cookbook *The Cook Not Mad* (Watertown [New York]: Knowlton & Rice, 1830). The author is unknown; even the author's sex is debatable. In the preface, the author goes to great length to explain that this is a book for the American Publick:

A Work on Cookery should be adapted to the meridian in which it is intended to circulate. It is needless to burden a country Cookery Book with receipts for dishes depending entirely upon seaboard markets, or which are suitable only to prepare food for the tables of city people, whose habits and customs differ so materially from those living in the country. Still further would the impropriety be carried were we to introduce into a work intended for the American Publick such English, French and Italian methods of rendering things indigestible, which are of themselves innocent, or of distorting and disguising the most loathsome objects to render them sufferable to already vitiated tastes. . .

It is thus ironic that the author offers, among the truly American recipes such as Johnny Cakes and Indian Slapjacks, those for British based puddings named Sunderland, Marlborough and Whitpot and cakes named Queen's, Shrewsbury, Tunbridge, Danbury and Derby.

But the greatest irony has to do with the publishing history of this treasured old volume. First published in upstate New York in 1830, it had two further American printings, 1831 and 1841. However, in 1831, it was printed across our northern border, in Kingston, Canada to become the first cookbook printed in Canada. Ironically, the only difference between the American and Canadian editions was the substitution in the title page of the words "Canadian Publick" for American Publick!" ◆

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IN THE ABRUZZI



by Ann Woodward

Though it had been three years since I traveled with him, Giuliano Bugialli looked and sounded the same when we met again this October in Florence: full of husky-voiced good humor and dark Italian good looks. I had come early, to spend a few days getting over the time change, but on Sunday we were to meet the others of the group at the airport in Rome. That meant leaving at 4:45 am with the bus. My sleep was so messed up, I didn't even nap as we rocked through the darkness. It rained.

After collecting 21 more people (one of Giuliano's other faithfuls had also been on the bus), all Americans this year, we found the ground dry enough for a tour of Hadrian's Villa. And then there was lunch, at the Hotel Adriano on the grounds of the gardens at Tivoli, lunch as it is experienced only in Italy: antipasto, bucatini, roast lamb, apple tart, coffee, grappa. This lunch, at a long table for all of us, set the tone for the feasts of the rest of the week. There was plenty of napping as the bus took us to L'Acquila, in the mountainous Abruzzi region.

Because of rain and mist the next day, we were unable to visit Gran Sasso, the highest peak in the Apennines. We walked to the daily market in the town square, where I bought a charming old bronze iron with a rooster latch and others bought umbrellas; where we saw bags of fresh arugula and dandelion, grapes that were tawny, translucent and sweet, tomatoes, lemons, many vegetables, and butcher shop trailers that had roasting ovens with open fires. Lunch was supposed to have been a picnic on the mountain. Giuliano called a local trattoria to ask if we could come. "I'm desperate!" he says he told them. And they didn't seem to mind having such a crowd of noisy Americans push all their tables together in the back room and eat very well on bread, salami, pasta and fruit. Always with plenty of Trebbiano wine.

Our next stop was at Vasto Porto, on the Adriatic Sea. The hotel was on the beach and I immediately went walking on the sand. Others did the same, one man got on his in-line skates, which he said he had not quite learned to stop, and set off along the road. Dinner that night at Il Corsaro was seafood. The restaurant was closed, so our traveling riot disturbed no

one. We ate steamed tiny clams, mussels, squid, scampi, several kinds of fish, and a special dessert. The courtly gentleman who was the owner got out his guitar and sang for us, we sang for him; one of our group had brought big Bravo Giuliano buttons, which she had distributed and which suddenly appeared on every lapel at the end of the meal. Giuliano was speechless.

A tour of the DelVerde factory at Faro San Martino made us enchanted with the monster machines that turned out pasta in various shapes, seemingly all by themselves. The De Cecco factory is right down the

road and the attraction here is the water, from a spring called something about green, hence the name of the company. This wonderful water pours continuously from a pipe out front and during lunch in the factory dining room,

we saw a waitress go out with a pitcher and fill it for our glasses. There was one more stop before we

reached Florence, where we would have two days of cooking classes and more special meals. That was at Teramo, another charming mountain town, dinner was at the restaurant Moderno. On the way next day, we had lunch at the restaurant Al Ponte in Scheggino, a center for black truffles.

At the beginning of the first cooking class, it seemed impossible that these 23 people who didn't know what to do or where anything was kept would be able to produce within three and a half hours a lunch of five courses, involving crespelle, fresh pasta, many sauces, baked eggplant slices, ossobuco, and a cake with a soaking syrup and an icing. We did it in four and a half hours. Don't ask about the cake, which was my project. I had to be rescued.

That night, too soon by far after our enormous lunch, we were off by bus to Colle Val d'Elsa for L'Antica Trattoria and another big meal. It was all so good that some of us ate too much. I wound up with gastritis and missed the whole next day, but I hear that they made chitarra pasta, for which the Abruzzi region is famous. In spite of vows never to pass more than water down my throat, I was soon in Venice and had good food there. And I will probably go again to feast with Giuliano—but more cautiously?

A WEEK OF EATING IN MOROCCO

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by Ari Weinzweig

ast month I had the pleasure to be part of Moroccan Culinary Week; an exceptional trip organized by Oldways. Sponsored by the International Olive Oil Council and the Moroccan government, the trip was an effort to introduce about 150 food writers, chefs and restaurateurs from the US, Canada, Europe and Australia to the intricacies of Moroccan cuisine. Without question, it was an adventure, a culinary and cultural experience which I'll remember for a long time.

Throughout the trip our Moroccan hosts stressed to us that "Moroccan cooking is the world's third great cuisine. French cuisine is the greatest (a nod to the ex-colonial rulers of the country), then Chinese, and then Moroccan. To the uninitiated this might seem a rather outrageous claim, and it's not for me to vouch for their ranking in the great cuisines of the world order. But the Moroccans really do have an intricate, original and complex cuisine, one that is truly unlike any other I've come into contact with.

The culinary highlights of the trip for me included:

The Spice Shops

I loved the spice shops. They're filled with hundreds of big jars of strange looking stuff - all completely un-labeled of course. Only the spice man knows for sure... The spice shops don't just sell spices - they also sell all the stuff you need to put a curse on your enemy, cures for mysterious maladies, potions, and perfumes. The closest comparison I can make is to visiting a tea shop in Chinatown. As a western tourist I was completely out of my league.

The shops sell an incredible spice blend called Ras el Hanout, which means "head of the shop." It's made from 27 to 47 different spices, depending on who you talk to. They make it up right while you're standing there, putting a piece of brown paper on the scale and then pulling one ingredient at a time in some order known only to them to make up your packet. You can buy Ras el Hanout "whole," or you can have it ground for you, so it's ready to use. I brought back a bit of each. Now and again, I pull it out and take a whiff to remind me of the markets. The smell of



the stuff is phenomenal - unlike anything else I've experienced.

Ras el Hanout is used in primarily in lamb dishes. It's also a key ingredient in majoun, the Moroccan hash jam that fascinated Paul Bowles (who ate a lot of it), and me (who's never eaten it).

The use of multiple spices is a hall-mark of Moroccan cooking, so it makes sense that all of the spices seemed to be particularly pungent. The cumin in particular was exceptional. Much earthier and sweeter than the Mexican cumin we get in this country. They use a lot of cinnamon, turmeric, saffron (the harvest of which was once a specialty of Moroccan Jews), paprika, sesame, ginger (dried and ground, rarely fresh), a variety of black peppercorns.

The Olive Markets

The olive market in Casablanca was memorable. In truth, it was exactly as I'd have imagined a Moroccan olive market to be. A dozen different stalls, each with a dozen or so different olives piled high in big, brown barrels. A dozen different colors shining in the sun - everything from green, to brown, to purple to black; smooth, cracked, shiny, wrinkled. Each olive mounded at the top of the barrel, many marinated with herbs and spices, looking full, fresh, delicious. We tried some marinated with hot chiles, some with preserved lemons, some with fresh cilantro.

Apparently all of the olives are of the same variety - the "Moroccan picholine" which makes up about 95% of Moroccan olive production. The differences come in the cure and in the time of harvesting. My particular favorites were the "violeta," beautiful plump, soft, sweet olives, cured first in salt brine, then in orange juice.

Bisteeya

This is one of the complex, festive dishes which the Moroccans took great pride in serving. Thin layers of flaky "warka" pastry (similar to phyllo) filled with pigeon, plenty of chopped nuts, eggs and spices (lots of cinnamon) then baked. We were served about half a dozen different versions of bisteeya over the course of the trip and some of them made for truly memorable, elegant eating.

Cous Cous

My American experience with cous cous was fairly limited, but it's a staple of the Moroccan table. I came away with impression that cous cous fills much the same role for Moroccans that pasta plays in Italy.

Cous cous is part of Morocco's Berber heritage. (The Berbers are the indigenous - and non-Arab- tribes of North Africa, and Morocco's present population is about 40% Berber.) There were many long discussions at the conference about "proper" cooking methods. I won't go into them here - see Paula Wolfert's Cous Cous and Other Good Food from Morocco for more details. (It's an hour-long multi-step process of washing,

drying, steaming, drying and resteaming.) Suffice it to say that Moroccans are passionate about proper cooking techniques. Once the cous cous itself has been prepared, then there are hundreds of different recipes for serving it, from simple "Berber cous cous" served with nothing but buttermilk, to my personal favorite with raisins and onions, to meat cous cous, to sweet cous cous with cinnamon, nuts and raisins for dessert. No matter what other dishes are served, cous cous is the last main dish of the meal. And it is always served on Fridays.

Tagines

These are both the name of a style of preparation, and also of the clay pots in which they are cooked. Vegetables, and/or meat, fish or poultry are cooked in the clay tagine with its tightly fitted dome, yielding a really flavorful dish. "Stew" is probably the best English word I can think of though that really doesn't convey the complexity of the dishes. My favorite was a fish tagine with saffron, cumin and other spices.

Preserved Lemons

Although I'd tasted them once or twice in the States, I never really understood what preserved lemons were about until this trip. Having had the chance to eat them in their natural environment, it was obvious that they're really an essential ingredient in Moroccan food. Fresh lemons are cured with salt and fresh lemon juice for about four weeks (again, see Paula Wolfert's book for recipe) - they can be made at home, though I haven't had time to try since my return, I will give it a shot soon. The Moroccans use them liberally in tagines and salads.

Meat and Butter

I expected Moroccan cooking to center around olive oil, but for most of the meals we ate, meat and butter dominated. Olive oil was there to dip bread in, but few dishes seemed to feature it. What oil we did taste was not impressive. The butter is primarily "smene," a clarified butter that I can best compare to the Indian "ghee."

Moroccan Tea

Moroccan tea was the first thing we were served when we got off the plane in Casablanca, and it was the conclusion to every meal of the trip.

While the tea itself isn't grown in Morocco, the preparation is (as far as I know) unique to Morocco. Green Chinese Gunpowder tea is blended about 1 to 4 with fresh mint leaves in silver tea pots. The Moroccans then add as much sugar as possible to the pot, and pour boiling water over top. The tea is poured out, tasted, returned to the pot a couple of times until the server is satisfied that it has steeped properly. When it's ready the tea is poured, often quite theatrically, by gradually lifting the pot a foot or two above the thin glasses in which it is served, and aiming a thin steady stream of steaming tea into the glasses.

Eating With Your Hands

Paula Wolfert would never forgive me if I didn't mention that one of the essential "ingredients" of Moroccan food is eating it, as the Moroccans do, with

your hands. Food is served in large bowls from the center of the table and everyone reaches in and eats from the common bowl. Although every meal we were served came with standard issue silverware, Paula is adamant that the food tastes better when you eat it with your fingers, so if you go to Morocco, make sure you try it.

Because we were traveling as guests of the government, we were given wonderfully hospitable v.i.p treatment every where we went. We were served many a majestic, festive, multi-course meal, which certainly conveyed the majesty of Moroccan cooking. The downside though is that I came back with little feel for how the average Moroccan really eats every day. My sense of it, from the Moroccans I spoke with, is that they eat much more simply, much less meat, much more emphasis on grains, pulses and beans.

I guess the ultimate demonstration of the complexity of Moroccan food is that as much as I've already written I could go on and on. We had incredible honey, oil from the nuts of the argon tree, an array of breads, some incredible vegetable salads, all sorts of almond based cookies and pastries, amazing fresh dates, the best almonds I've ever had, excellent sardines, pomegranates, and much, much more.



CHICAGO PALETAS

A Street Treat Vignette

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by Evelyn J. Thompson

hicago still has strong, distinct ethnic neighborhoods and the taste treats of these areas spill over in wondrous ways. One such example is the magical Carro de Paletas (Mexican ice cream cart) that seems to wander all over our streets and parks. The arrival of warm weather and the opportunity to taste ambrosia Mexican style is announced by the jing/jang of silver bells attached to the push handle of the Carro de Paletas. These little, dry icepacked, heavily insulated chests mounted on small rubber wheels are white or light green with the name of the ice cream companies lettered on the sides. The handle comes up only as high as the top of the cart which has a tight-fitting lid squarely placed in the middle, with a black knob. The chest is filled with very moderately priced ice cream and fruit bars (similar to a sorbet) produced here in Chicago and my sources say they taste like the paletas found in Mexico City. Every morning, the peddlers go to the factory, get their equipment and supplies of paletas and then,

carts and men are taken by truck to various locations. From mid-morning to early evening they walk their assigned areas— sometimes with three or four different companies vying for customers simultaneously. During the heat of the day you often see a Carro de Paletas traffic jam caused by several vendors who have stopped to rest and talk to



each other. Other gatherings occur when an entire family (infants to grandma) enjoy their paletas while standing around the cart and conversing with the vendor (who is possibly from their home town in Mexico).

Here is how I usually experience my favorite summer cooler.

Ever so subtly, the bells of the ice cream cart nudge my awareness like an unnoticed strip of sun on my skin. Dashing out of my front door, I look and listen for the slowly moving vendor and then start running. When I reach the cart, it

seems very natural for me to look into the chest as the vendor searches through the stacks of frozen bars to find my chosen flavor. I can choose ice cream made of mango, strawberry, coconut, butter pecan, vanilla, rice or banana. At the bottom of each bar is a piece of fruit (ie: mango ice cream with a strip of mango) or a blob of coconut, pecans, or rice. The flavor of the fruit bars are tamarind, strawberry, watermelon, lemon, cantaloupe, pina colada and pineapple. All of the paletas are a treat- not too sweet, not too heavyand the flavors are unabashedly fresh and intense. The texture is perfect and the edges of the paletas are melted ever so slightly, making for a very delightful first bite. By the time I am down to that piece of mango, I have a rivulet running down the outside of my hand. Asking for a napkin is a chance to see how the cart man carries his napkins, since each one has his individual way of storing these things. Some produce the napkins with a quick, efficient stroke while others seem lost to the idea that frozen bars melt in summer. Hoping to keep the thought of sun and warmth alive during our wonderful Chicago winters I have purchased sacks of these treasures to freeze, but the taste and texture are just not as luscious as directly from the cart. When the carillon of the Carro de Paletas is no longer heard, I know fall is coming and summer is over. •

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White Trash Cooking by Ernest Matthew Mickler: Jargon Society Inc., 1986, The Highlands, N. C.

Preparing for a trip to Italy to travel with my cooking teacher friend, I had not meant to take him a gift, until I came across this book. Actually what really sold me the book was a collection of color photos in the center. But before I wrapped it up, I looked through the recipes.

This is not food for weight-conscious moderns, there is plenty of oleo, sugar and "Reddi Whip." Canned fruits, veg-

etables and soups are often called for. Some of the more colorful titles of dishes are: Russian Communist Tea Cakes, Washday Soup, Limpin' Susie (onions, okra, ham), Day-old Fried Fish, Our Lord's Scripture Cake and Mama's Gone Fudge. But there are also scrambled eggs with slivered almonds, spinach pie, black bean soup. and a magnificent recipe for Whiskey Sauce calling for Jack Daniels Black Label (and, for once, real butter).

This is good ole boys and girls in the kitchen, written in jargon throughout (taters, oleo). There are recipes for:

rabbit, squirrel, 'gator tail, possum, and cooter (turtle). Ingredient lists are dicey, for instance figs left out of a recipe for Bishops Hats Fig Surprise, flour left out of a pound cake. In the introduction, this cooking is compared to European peasant cuisine, a comparison which doesn't quite hold, for me, because of the many uses of canned and packaged foods. But I certainly read it through with lively interest. —A.W.•

Lucy Seligman

Prior to the state visit in June by Japan's emperor and empress, Lucy Seligman was consulted by the Boulder, Colorado *Daily Camera* about culinary preferences and probable approach to American food by the royal couple and she was quoted extensively.

Portions here are very large, she said, compared to Japanese servings, but the royal couple will probably taste everything. Emperor Akihito is known to take only a sip of alcoholic drinks; Empress Michiko likes to cook and has her own kitchen in the private residence on the palace grounds, as does Crown Princess Masako; foreign food, usually French, is often served at state dinners in Japan; the emperor is still fond of Japanese curry rice, a simple dish he became used to in his student days. "I think what we'll see, on this visit, are two people who, in their Japanese way, are very enthusiastic about what they're doing. They will try anything," Lucy is quoted as saying.

There was a notice in USA Today about Lucy's newsletter *Gochiso-Sama!*, with information about subscriptions. Lucy lived in Japan for thirteen years, teaching bilingual cooking classes and editing the quarterly newsletter about Japanese food. The newsletter may be ordered by writing to 627 Watersedge

Dr., Ann Arbor, Mi. 48105, cost is \$20 a year.

In September, Lucy spoke on "Chinese Influence on Japanese Cuisine" at a meeting in New York of The Institute for the Advancement of the Science and Art of Chinese Cuisine.

Yvonne Lockwood

The Ann Arbor News published an extensive story about Yvonne on October 23. She is Curator of Folklife at the Michigan State University Museum and the story recounted her history as a folklore expert and the role of food in her studies, mentioning especially the pasties of the Upper Peninsula.

Marcia Adams

This writer of cookbooks and TV personality is publishing a quarterly new-sletter from her home in Indiana. There are, in the first issue, recipes, musings and memories, and advice about surviving the holidays.

Cost of the newsletter is \$18., address is P. O. Box 40086, Fort Wayne, IN 46804.

Ari Weinzweig

Fine Cooking magazine, published by The Taunton Press, first appeared on the newsstands in 1994. The premier issue (February/March) included an article written by Ari called "Great American Cheeses - Domestic delights and where to find them". The current issue (October/November) of the same publication holds yet another article written by Ari entitled "Talking Tea - If all you've known are tea-bag brews, you're in for an explosion of flavors". Good bet we'll be seeing more from him in future issues.

Julie Lewis and Carroll Thomson

Both women have joined and can provide further information regarding:

The Tea Society

The list of goals of this new society begins "To create the Tea Drinker's Bill of Rights" and goes on from there to promote the idea of increased offering of quality tea in public settings and education about the service of tea.

Membership brings, among other benefits, a generous newsletter.

Jan Longone

Jan will be judging for the Fifth Annual Tabasco Community Cookbook Awards again this year. Publications in the program's Hall of Fame category have earned contributions of over \$26 million.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Food Related Travel

Oldways Preservation & Exchange Trust:

March, 1995 - Lecce, Italy: "Italy and its Traditional Diets in the Next Century April, 1995 - New York City: Turkey: An Exchange of Chefs, Recipes, Techniques and Products May 6-7, 1995 - New York City: Readable Feasts: The Second Annual Festival of Books and Cooks June 20-26, 1995 - Lisbon, Portugal: The Old Ways of Food, Wine and Port in Portugal

September 9-13, 1995 - Louisville, Kentucky: Farms, Food and Wellness: Partners for a Healthy America Travel
Festivals
Classes

October, 1995 - Washington, DC: Spain: An Exchange of Chefs, Recipes, Techniques and Products

For more information: Oldways Preservation & Exchange Trust 617-695-2300

Giuliano Bugialli:

Florence in the Spring I May 7-14 May 21-28 Florence in the Spring II June 25-July 2 Italian Tradition Sept. 10-17 Florence in the Fall I Florence in the Fall II Sept. 17-24 Oct. 8-15 Florence in the Fall III Emilia and Romagna Tour Oct. 18-25 Christmas in Florence Dec. 20-27

For more information:

Giuliano Bugialli's Cooking in Florence 212-966-5325 or Ann Woodward 313-665-7345 December 11: Food and Poetry - Annual participatory dinner meeting

January 15: Chinese Influence on Japanese Cuisine Speaker - Lucy Seligman

February 19: A Taste of Culture: What Makes Japanese Food, Japanese? Speaker - Elizabeth Andoh

March 19: Chinese Banquet location to be announced

April 16: The Road to Battle Creek Speaker - Patricia Cornett

May 21: Culinary Herbs and Edible Plants: A Guided Tour at the Matthaei Botanical Gardens Speaker - Rodger Kellor

Washtenaw County Extension Service Building, 4133 Washtenaw Avenue, Ann Arbor, Michigan Time 7:00 - 9:00 pm (unless otherwise noted)

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